

# Black Flag

FOR ANARCHIST

RESISTANCE

## *Making history or just repeating it?*

At the dawn of a new century, the socialist movement is at a crossroads. All around the world a new wave of popular protest and revolt is erupting. More and more people are questioning the capitalism, in thought and in action. The idea that capitalism can produce a decent society which can adequately meet the needs of the majority is being refuted by its practice. The notion that this system has something to do with liberty is equally refuted by economic power and wage slavery.

We've been here before. Over a hundred years ago, Social Democracy was on the rise. Like the Socialist Party and Socialist Alliance today, the Social Democrats considered themselves as revolutionary socialists who aimed to use the ballot box as a weapon against capitalism. Across the world, they met with various degrees of success. However, this "success" was more apparent than real. Slowly but surely socialist principles became watered down, revolutionary ideas were paid lip-service to as the parties activities became increasingly reformist in nature. Practice and rhetoric finally collided with the outbreak of the First World War, when almost all the social democratic parties supporting their ruling class in the slaughter. After the war, they helped crush the German and Italian revolutions, saving the very system they were founded to abolish.

Decades later, the same fate befell the German Green Party. Claiming to be an "anti-party party," they, like the first social democrats, argued for both direct action and standing in elections. History repeated itself. Like the social democrats, they became reformist, standing out only for the rapidity with

which careerism, party politics, and business-as-usual once again played themselves out in their saga of compromise and betrayal of principle. Under the superficial veil of their old values, they have become 'practical,' 'realistic' and 'power-orientated.'

These betrayals did not spring out of nowhere. Rather, they were the end product of years of activity within capitalist institutions. Nor were they unexpected. Anarchists from the start argued that standing in elections would see socialism replaced by reformism. History has proven us right time and time again.

Anarchism recognised that socialism cannot be created via the ballot box. It can only be created from below, by direct action, solidarity and the creation of new forms of organisation rooted in our communities and workplaces. Only by organising, fighting back, and practising solidarity where we live and work, can we really change things. That is where our power lies, that is where we can create a real alternative.

By creating a network of self-managed community and workplace organisations, we can impose by direct action that which politicians can never give us. This also creates the framework of the future society, showing that people can manage their own affairs for themselves. This experience of "anarchy in action" helps change ideas far better than a million election manifestos. It shows that socialism is not a utopian vision, but rather a viable alternative. It shows how to change society - that another world is possible.

Do you want to make history or just repeat it? If the former, then anarchism is for you.

The only way to change the world



Direct Action



Solidarity



Self-Management



# Socialism or Social Democracy?

While some claim that social democracy had always been reformist, aiming to improve capitalism slowly but surely, that is not the case. When it started, social democracy was far from that. It was a self-proclaimed international revolutionary socialist party, aiming to abolish capitalism by any means necessary -- including the ballot box.

Ignoring the warnings of anarchism, Social Democratic Parties argued that electioneering was a key way of spreading socialist ideas and winning people to anti-capitalism. This proved to be their undoing. Slowly but surely, the parties involved became increasingly reformist, betraying their principles to get into and remain in office. The predictions of the anarchists came true. Socialist rhetoric was used to hide moderate practice.

Not that the contradiction between the party's rhetorical adherence to socialism and its growing opportunistic pragmatism went unnoticed. It provoked an intense theoretical debate, which raged furiously from about 1898 to 1904. However, the distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action. In the end, rather than change the world, Social Democracy simply changed itself to accommodate its tactics.

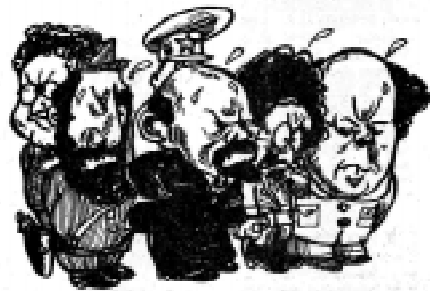
The descent into reformism

Working in a capitalist institution will have its effect on those who do so. The corruption does not happen overnight. At the start, the party argues that it takes part in elections to advocate radical ideas. But ends are not independent of means. Even with the best of intentions, the radicals who get elected find themselves powerless to accomplish anything of a radical nature. The demoralisation this brings about takes place little by little, so gradually that few notice it, including the radical politician. They quickly perceive that they are regarded as a laughing stock by the other politicians and find more and more difficulty in securing the floor. When they do, they know that neither their speech nor their vote can influence the proceedings. Their speeches do not even reach the public, just the occasional sound bite. The only solution is to elect more comrades. Years pass and a number are elected. Each of them goes through the same experience and quickly comes to the conclusion that to make an impact they must show that they are practical, that they are doing something for their constituency. The situation compels them to take a 'practical' part in the proceedings, to 'talk business,' to fall in line with the matters actually dealt with in the legislative body (i.e. making capitalism work and run better).

Spending years in that atmosphere, enjoying good jobs and pay, the elected radicals have themselves become part and parcel of the political machine. With growing success in elections and securing political power, they become more and more conservative and content with existing conditions. Removal from the life of the working class, living in the atmosphere of the bourgeoisie, they have become what they call 'practical'. Power and position have gradually stifled their conscience and they do not have the strength and honesty to swim against the current. They become the strongest bulwark of capitalism. They even end up opposing direct action and any spontaneous struggle which hinders the respectable image of the party and its potential

votes. This is in spite of the revolutionary ideas that originally inspired them. Indeed, they were sucked into "practical" matters almost from the start. In the words of Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the original leaders of German Social Democracy: "In the early stages, when we had few adherents, we used to go to the Reichstag [the German Parliament] and used it exclusively or almost exclusively for the propagation of our ideas. But very soon we found ourselves involved in practical matters."

However, many radicals refuse to learn this lesson of history and keep trying to create a new party that will not repeat the saga of compromise and betrayal which all other radical parties have suffered. And they say that anarchists are utopian!



work under specific conditions. Without a mass movement in our communities and workplaces, all reforms bar the most weak will be dead-letters. And electioneering undermines such a movement, drawing resources and activity away from this, our only real weapon in the class war.

This is ignored by supporters of "ballot box" socialism, who think that only their party can ignore the demands of the dominant class in society while being part of its protector and creature, the state! The intentions and will-power of the people involved are rarely a match for the state, the way it is structured to protect and enforce capitalist rule, the influences and pressures of the permanent state apparatus on the elected representatives, the economic pressure exerted by capital, and so on.



For more on the Anarchist critique of State Socialism visit:

Anarchism and the left: [anarchism.ws/lef.h.ml](http://anarchism.ws/lef.h.ml)

Anarchism and Marxism: [www.infoshop.org/faq/secHcon.h.ml](http://www.infoshop.org/faq/secHcon.h.ml)

Criticising the Authoritarian left: [www.infoshop.org/texts/iso.h.ml](http://www.infoshop.org/texts/iso.h.ml)

The root of the problem

Ultimately, supporters of using political action can only appeal to the good intentions and character of their candidates. This time, we are told, our leaders will be better. Anarchists, however, present an analysis of the structures and other influences that will determine how the character of the successful candidates and their political parties will change. In other words, in contrast to state socialists, anarchists present a materialist, scientific analysis of the dynamics of electioneering and its effects on radicals.

The state is not some neutral body that can be used by all classes in society. It is an instrument of class rule, a machine that exists to protect the wealth and power of the capitalist class and to enforce their property rights and authority. As well as economic pressures from capitalists resulting from capital flight, lack of investment, and withdrawal of support, representatives also face pressures within the state itself due to its bureaucracy. There is a difference between the state and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The government is made up of various politicians. It is the institutions that have power due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. We cannot expect different politicians to act in different ways to the same pressures.

And even if a party gained office without losing its radicalism, it could do nothing. Not only is there the state bureaucracy, the armed forces and police which would hinder the new government while seeking to overthrow it, but no law is miraculous. Economic pressure from business would soon undermine any radical reforms. No law can prevent the capitalists from exploiting their workers. No law can force them to keep their factories open and employ

Leaders and Led

The use of electioneering has a centralising effect on the movements that use it.

The state has been developed to enforce minority rule. It has evolved a structure based upon minority, top-down rule that ensures the continuation and protection of that rule. The state is hierarchical despotism. It is based on delegating power into the hands of a few - in a democracy, elected representatives and the state bureaucracy. It is a truism that elections empower the politicians and not the voters. Using the ballot box, by its very nature, focuses the fight for change into the hands of a few. Rather than those involved doing the fighting, the organising, the decision making, power rests in the hands of the representative. The importance of the leaders is stressed, as it must be in a centralised system.

Within the party, electioneering has a similar impact. Political action comes to be considered as parliamentary activities made for the population by their representatives, with the 'rank and file' left with no other role other than that of passive support. Only the leaders are actively involved and the main emphasis falls upon them within the party as well. It soon becomes taken for granted that they should determine policy (even ignoring conference decisions when required). In the end, party conferences become simply like parliamentary elections, with party members supporting this leader against another.

Soon the party reflects the division between manual and mental labour so necessary for the capitalist system. Instead of working class self-activity and self-determination, there is a substitution. A non-working class leadership develops which acts for people, replacing self-management in social struggle and within the party itself. Electioneering strengthens the leaders dominance over the party, reducing internal democracy and marginalising the

members within it.

### Socialism from Below?

Thus electioneering results in the fight being carried out by means of leaders, in which the masses can play but a minor role. In practice it means a handful of individuals, the representatives, carry on the struggle on behalf of the masses. It can only lead to the illusion that others can do the fighting for us — regardless of the wishes of the leaders in question. Once radicals are elected the whole focal point of struggle changes. Rather than direct struggle against the state and the boss, this is no longer needed as the elected representatives will act or people will think they will act and so not act themselves. They have elected someone to fight for them and so do not need to fight themselves. If radicals are elected to fight for people, can we be surprised if people do not act themselves? The notion that reforms (indeed, the revolution) would be the work of leaders acting on behalf of the masses soon followed, with the masses reduced to voters and followers, not active participants in the struggle.

Moreover, socialist support for electioneering is somewhat at odds with their claims of being in favour of collective, mass action. There is nothing more isolated, atomised and individualistic than voting. It is the total opposite of collective struggle. The individual is alone before, during and after the act of voting. Unlike direct action, which, by its very nature, throws up new forms of organisation in order to manage and co-ordinate the struggle, voting creates no alternative organs of working class self-management. Nor can it. It is not based on, nor does it create, collective action or organisation. Given that socialists often slander anarchists as "individualists" the irony is delicious!



Socialism can never come above via the ballot box . . . Socialism can only be created from below, by the direct action, mass participation and self-organisation of working class people.

### Building the new world while fighting the old

Anarchists argue that the erosion of internal democracy and socialist principles is inevitable in any organisation which operates within, and models itself upon, the hierarchical, centralised capitalist state. The institutional pressures upon it grinds away at the honest intentions of the party, turning it slowly but surely into a mirror image of the system it claims to oppose.

For this reason anarchists argue that we must apply our socialist principles in the organisations we create to fight capitalism. This means that any group must be self-managed, with policy decided directly by the members in mass assembly. Decisions would be co-ordinated by means of mandated delegates subject to instant recall. If any delegate ignores the wishes of the membership, they would be recalled and replaced by someone who executed the decisions of the

self-activity, self-organisation, direct action and mass struggle required for radical and lasting reform, never mind a social revolution. It generates reformism, not socialism.

We can only achieve socialism by practising it in the here and now. Anarchism is clear. Socialism can never come above via the ballot box. The state is the means by which minorities establish and organise their power over the masses. It cannot be the force that will serve to destroy those privileges.

Socialism can only be created from below, by the direct action, mass participation and self-organisation of working class people. Electioneering is political activity that makes the work dependent on the ability of leaders, using capitalist institutions. Direct action is political activity that makes the struggle the task of the working class itself, using working class organisations. The sooner we learn this and start applying it, the better!

base assemblies. In this way real power would rest in the hands of the membership, not in a handful of leaders.

Such an organisation would exist to encourage the same principles in social struggle. It would aim to create a federation of self-managed workplace and community assemblies which would use direct action and solidarity to win improvements under capitalism while trying to get rid of it once and for all. The idea that socialists standing for elections somehow prepares working class people for revolution is simply wrong. Standing in elections only prepares people for following leaders — it does not encourage the

## Ideas to change the world or just the bosses?

Those seeking an alternative to the dead end of social democracy and to reclaim the liberatory promise of socialism often find the ideas of Leon Trotsky attractive. Trotsky is presented as the democratic alternative to Stalinism, reclaiming and defending the best of the Bolshevik tradition and socialism. This perspective is false. Here is Trotsky on the necessity of party dictatorship -- the dictatorship over the proletariat.

"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party . . . In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. . . ." (1920)

"They place the workers' right to elect representatives - above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. . . ." (1921)

"If there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work . . . ." (1923)

"The growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party." (1927)

"The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard . . . a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society. . . Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat." (1937)

"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity . . . The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter. . . The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions." (1937)

"The very same masses, are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves . . . if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself." (1939)



# For a socialism that liberates!

The history of state socialism is a history of failure. The ideals, hopes and dreams that inspired millions of working class people to fight for a better world have continually been betrayed. Parties which proudly proclaimed their socialism have either become reformists (social democracy) or dictators (Bolshevism). Little wonder the left is in such a state.

Anarchists are not surprised by this. We predicted that by standing in capitalist elections, socialist parties would become reformist. We predicted that a so-called "workers' government" would quickly become a power over the working class and just as oppressive as capitalism. Indeed, all the "victories" of this form of socialism ended up providing empirical evidence in support of the anarchist critique of it - with "victories" like these, it does not need defeats!

## The alternative

There is an alternative. State socialism is not the only form of socialism. There is another form, libertarian socialism, or anarchism. So what is the anarchist alternative?

Anarchists argue that socialism has to be anti-authoritarian to be socialism. We need to reclaim the power that has been concentrated into the hands of the state and the capitalist class. That is why we stress direct action. Through direct action, the people create their own struggle; it is they who conduct it, organise it, manage it. They do not hand over to others their own acts and task of self-liberation. That way, we become accustomed to managing our own affairs, creating alternative, libertarian, forms of social organisation, which can become a force to resist the state and the bosses, win reforms, and become the framework of a free society. Direct action creates organs of direct working class power (such as community assemblies, factory committees, workers' councils, and so on) which, to use Bakunin's words, are "creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."

Anarchists argue that electioneering is not only harmful to constructive socialism, it is unnecessary. Action speaks louder than words. Using elections for propaganda, as a means of winning working class people to socialism, is like building a house on sand. We need to create firm foundations for socialism -- and that means extra-parliamentary organisations, direct action and solidarity. Non-socialists will see our strikes, our protests, our occupations, our popular assemblies and action committees. They will hear our words, they will see our lead. This is the best propaganda — socialism in action!

People learn to be free only by exercising their freedom. We are not going to find ourselves with people ready-made for the future. Anarchists support direct action because it transforms those who use it. It is the means of creating a new consciousness, a means of self-liberation from the chains placed around our minds, emotions and spirits by hierarchy and oppression.

Anarchists emphasise that the class struggle is the only means for working class people to

achieve control over their destiny. We try to promote a culture of resistance within society that makes the state subject to pressure from without. We need to organise and fight where we have real power — in our communities and workplaces. We can impose from the streets and workplaces that which ministers and deputies can never realise in parliament.

By doing this we create the embryo of the society which will replace capitalism. Socialism can only be based on the mass organisations that we create to fight the current system, on the federations of strike and community assemblies, communes and workers' councils, anarchists argue for in the class war.

## Societies of Resistance!

Instead of begging the State for a reform, workplace and community organisations must directly impose any reform on the state or the employers. In this way, instead of a legal text that remains a dead letter, real change is effected by the direct initiative of ordinary people. If we devoted all our activity and energy to the organisation of these "societies of resistance"; if we keep up a permanent socialist and revolutionary agitation; if, by linking practice to theory, we realise directly, without any bourgeois and governmental intervention, all immediately possible reforms; then the cause of labour would be better served than any re-run of social democracy.

Anarchists argue that socialism can only be created and run from below, directly by the working class itself. Unlike state socialism, we do not equate or confuse popular power with party power, nor socialism with state capitalism. For us, socialism has to be rooted in self-management. That is the true meaning of anti-authoritarianism. Not for us Lenin and Trotsky's "one-man management" or "revolutionary" government by a few party leaders in the name of the working class.

We remember that socialism means the end of wage slavery, not its universalisation under state ownership. We are for socialisation, not nationalisation. Workers' self-management must replace capitalist and state socialist hierarchy. No more bosses, not even red ones.

Anarchists also reject the state, every state, as a tool for minority power. Instead of giving power to a central committee, we argue that real freedom and equality mean that people govern themselves in a free federation of directly democratic communities ("communes"). This federation, like that in industry, will be run from the bottom up by means of mass assemblies mandating delegates and subjecting them to instant recall. No more politicians. Power remains at the bottom of society, in the hands of ordinary people who know what's best for themselves, their communities, their workplaces and the planet.

For a socialism that actually liberates, rather than just changing the bosses, we need to learn the lessons of history. The greatest of these is that the ideas of state socialism will ever achieve the promise of socialism. For that we need real anti-authoritarian socialism, socialism from below -- anarchism.

## Black Flag



For a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

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